

SB 260 Senate Committee Brief

*For the
Fish and Game Committee*

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Purpose

Succinctly put, this bill is seeking to provide an additional tool to the Commission to better manage predators that are subject to drawing a permit.

History

Nearly 8 years ago, the Commission instituted the utilization of draw permits to manage lion hunting opportunities in Regions 1 and 2. This was done in response to social conflicts between resident houndsmen, local hunters and outfitters. At that time, all districts were managed as open quota that resulted in unacceptable social conflicts in the field, unethical harvest practices, and poor management of the species harvest outcomes through a stressful 1-800 district monitor/closure system. The new system of issuing permits would bring ethics and normalcy to managing the species, and eliminate the social conflicts in the field. While the new system did in fact successfully accomplish those goals, three main negative impacts resulted that have yet to be addressed:

1. Actual management of lion populations has not been held in check as not all permit holders harvest lions
2. Nonresident participation in lion hunting has plummeted and the resultant loss of tourism dollars has been material
3. Outfitters in Regions 1 & 2 who legally provided services to nonresidents had this portion of their business decimated

Process

Since adopting the new system, the outfitting industry has attempted many times to work with the Commission and the Department to come up with a more equitable solution that retained many of the solid benefits to the new system, but allowed for better balance and parity among ALL participants. The most significant breakthrough was the adoption of a hybrid method of permit usage/open quota application now in use in Region 2. Unfortunately due to the autonomy of Regional management within the Department, Region 1 was successful in preventing implementing this solution within that region. This legislation is an effort to attempt to create at least a minor contribution to try to improve nonresident and outfitter participation

Salient Facts

1. Upon enactment of the new permit system in Regions 1 & 2, Twenty-Four (24) outfitters immediately lost 20% or greater of their gross income from providing outfitting services.
2. The ripple effect extends to the houndsmen hired by the outfitters, local businesses such as restaurants, hotels, gas stations, sporting goods stores, etc. It is estimated that there has been a minimum of \$1,000,000 in much needed revenue lost in these communities annually from the loss of nonresident visitation during a period (December to March) difficult to attract tourist revenue.
3. Nearly 95% of all lion hunting in these regions is done on USFS land, national interest property. These unique lands were set aside for the enjoyment of all Americans – residents and nonresidents alike.
4. Since the enactment of this permit process, the majority of districts have not met the quota of lions as set forth by the Department. In many years harvest as a percentage of granted permits has been less than 50% for multiple years. The impact on ungulates in many districts has been severe in particular when combined with other predation and severe winter conditions.
5. In response to quotas not being met year-after-year, many of the district quotas have been nearly doubled in a 7-year span. Clearly the department understands that the predator management objective is not being met by the new system, but increasing quotas in an attempt to guess the fulfillment to quota percentage is a slippery slope. This system runs just as great a risk of having a material over harvest of the species in any one year as the old pure open quota system.
6. For reasons not fully understood, resident permit holders are simply not harvesting lions. Perhaps they didn't get out as much as they would have liked, don't have the resources to hire an outfitter, or would simply prefer to tree a cat versus harvest one. Regardless, of the reason the facts are quite clear, the current system does not manage lion population numbers as predators.
7. The proposed increase to allocated permits to nonresidents is at the discretion of the Commission. It is not mandatory, but merely a means by which the Commission can effect better management of the predator as required by statute on a district by district basis. The decision process is still maintained by the Commission, this only gives them more latitude to effectuate solutions.

Conclusion

The industry is looking for workable solutions that allow participation by all on a more equitable basis, while at the same time properly manage a predator that impacts our precious ungulate populations.

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